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ABSTRACT

Educational organizations, particularly elementary and secondary schools are deeply institutionalized and notoriously resistant to change. British Columbia's "Program for Quality Teaching" (PQT), an innovative professional development program based on peer consultation, is described and analyzed in this paper. A portrait of PQT's 5-year history and outcomes is presented next. Data were derived from personal experience, archival analysis, a survey of all 79 first-year participants, and 75 interviews with teachers. The factors for the program's effectiveness and growth are analyzed. Based on Bolman and Deal's (1984) discussion of "organizational frames," it is suggested that the nature of PQT allowed boundaries between frames to be overlapped. Speculation on PQT's lessons for organizational change in education is provided. A conclusion is that PQT fulfilled multiple needs for teachers, schools, and administrators by enhancing teachers' professional identity, growth, and recognition; bypassing labor relations issues; and creating a visible, shared product. However, because the innovation cannot easily confront the bureaucratic structure without affecting the symbolic, political, and human resource domains, it remains a program for individual rather than system change. (11 references) (LMI)

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PORTRAIT OF A SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION: BRITISH COLUMBIA'S PROGRAM FOR QUALITY TEACHING

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Introduction: Institutionalization and Change in Education

Educational organizations, particularly elementary and secondary schools are deeply institutionalized and hence notoriously resistant to change. In this research we describe and analyze British Columbia's "Program for Quality Teaching" (PQT). This innovative effort to foster teachers' professional development, through reciprocal peer consultation, explicitly and implicitly challenged educators' beliefs about supervisory practices. After briefly reviewing the literature on institutionalization and change and describing predominant practices in teacher supervision, we provide a portrait of PQT that includes its five-year history and the evidence that leads us to argue the program's success. We follow that with a more detailed analysis of reasons for its effectiveness and growth. Our interpretation relies heavily on Bolman and Deal's (1984) discussion of organizational "frames," although we suggest that the nature of PQT allowed it to span boundaries between the frames. Finally, we speculate on PQT's lessons for organizational change in education.

Schools are the most institutionalized of organizations in that their fundamental structural arrangements have been broadly accepted as the natural way to imbue children with the skills, behaviors, and formal knowledge they

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will need to function as adults in the society (Meyer & Scott, 1983). Legitimate to actors, patrons, and mostly to their young clients specifically is the segregation of pupils by age, the preference "local" schools where feasible, the housing of teachers and their students in physically distinct classrooms, the division of knowledge into universal subject areas, and specified educational requirements for teachers. Institutionalization renders change difficult.

Change does occur, much of it incremental as individual and collective adaptive responses diffuse beyond their originators and move classrooms, buildings, and systems in new directions. Planned change, the commitment to an orderly, and thoughtful, and participative process of change provides a framework for melding the change requirements of super- and subordinates. The extensive literature on planned changes suggest the following factors are associated with successful change in schools: the combination of institutional commitment, appropriate structural rearrangement, teacher willingness to change (Charters & Jones, 1975); teachers professional commitment and association membership (Corwin, 1975); the relative advantage of the new idea including its compatibility with teachers' values, needs and previous ideas, and implementation strategies that reduce both complexity and risk for adopters (Rogers & Svenning, 1969). PQT represents an integration of professionals' enthusiasm, the loosely coupled nature of most school systems in even a relatively centralized provincial setting, and a planned change process that served the political needs of teachers, administrators, and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (B.C.T.F.).

This report is primarily interpretive and theoretical, but is based on extensive contact with PQT on the part of both authors. One of us was an independent staff development consultant who became part of the initial training team, and subsequently used the project as the basis of a doctoral dissertation in educational policy and management. The other is an organizational researcher and consultant who assisted in designing the B.C.T.F.'s

evaluation and research program on PQT and served as co-chair of the former's dissertation committee. In addition to archival data, we report briefly on a survey of all 79 first year PQT participants conducted in 1987 and on 75 interviews (including second and third interviews with some individuals) with teachers in two of the first four districts implementing the program. A follow-up survey is currently (January 1990) in the field.

PQT: A Description

The Program for Quality Teaching stresses peer consultation which incorporates the specific techniques of observation and feedback derived from the "clinical supervision" approach to teacher supervision and evaluation through a reciprocal, egalitarian two-person team. Each team member is in turn observer and observed (Acheson, 1988). Specific techniques--preconferencing, listening, observing, post-conferencing, etc.--are first taught in workshops, then tried out in practice, and followed-up in subsequent workshops. The program goals stress individual and collective professional growth and improvement, grounded in a rhetoric of "reflective practice." Ongoing professional development, an aggressive attack on teacher isolation, and a desire to avoid the one-stop, one-shot approaches to professional in-service activities were subsidiary goals. As the dyad is closed and private, the process sidesteps teachers' regular formal evaluations. An explicit goal is to avoid conflict between the principal's simultaneous responsibilities of evaluating and improving individual teachers (Weber, 1987).

PQT originated in 1984. The B.C.T.F. wanted to initiate a program that would preempt a proposed provincially mandated teacher evaluation scheme. Eventially, teacher-adminsitrator working group explicitly separated evaluation and improvement, and chose to focus on the latter. This reflected an early document (BCTF, December, 1984) that had moved the federation to "develop and deliver a professional program whereby the federation/local association

[provide] professional assistance for teachers requiring [it]," but also stressed improving already good teaching as well as remediating poor teaching.

PQT began with workshops in two districts during summer, 1986 and expanded gradually both inside those districts and to additional districts. Within participating districts, teachers volunteer to participate individually. Within each school at least two teachers and their principal participate in the intensive five-day introductory workshop. These workshops, planned by participants as well as facilitators, have a high (6:1) ratio of participants to facilitators. The latter are predominantly B.C. teachers seconded by their districts for the workshops. Program goals are addressed in workshop sections on interpersonal communication needed for conferences, analysis of teaching, current research on teaching and learning, and teaching methodologies. Teacher pairs are trained to focus on specific classroom activities selected by each observee. Hence, instructional goals are individual rather than collective. Typically, teachers observe one another on a monthly basis.

The program is unusual in its cost sharing. The B.C.T.F. underwrote initial program development, training, and consultation costs. School districts provide release time for teachers (by paying substitutes) while they are in workshops or observing one another. Teachers contribute by giving up at least two weekend days for training and by agreeing to arrange, without compensation time, necessary conferences with their fellow peer consultant. Each district and the Federation made three-year commitments to the program.

On what grounds can we consider PQT successful? Two types of data are significant. First, survey and interview data conducted during the program's first eighteen months indicate that participants are almost unanimous in their positive reaction and desire to continue the program. High satisfaction with the structure and content of the program itself, with the support level from the teachers' federation and district and building administrators, and with the impact of the program on individual professional development and collegial

relationships are virtually universal in both instruments. However, two caveats: These data were collected early in the program and positive response may reflect a Hawthorne effect. Data from our present survey will clarify this issue. Second, as volunteers program participants were presumably predisposed to respond favorably; positive responses may merely reflect a strong fit between these teachers and this program.

PQT's sustained growth, because it reflects both the attraction of new volunteers and the continued financial support of new districts and the B.C.T.F. in a period of scarce resources, provides a second indicator by which we may consider the program successful. The program has grown from its original three districts, 18 schools and 70 participants in 1986 to its present 7 districts, 57 schools, and 252 participants. All five districts involved in the program during its first 18 months added at least a second wave of teachers. In one district, however, no new groups were added after the second year set of training sessions. The program continuing without growing further, apparently because administrators had difficulty refraining from involvement in the peer observation process.

PQT as an Organizational Phenomenon: An Interpretation

As with many potential innovations, PQT from its inception appeared to contain many features promised success: Institutional commitment, widely-shared ownership, and broad interest and enthusiasm among most participants. That these advantages were realized owes much to the coincidence of the four conceptually distinct but practically overlapping aspects of organizational life: the bureaucratic-structural, the political, the cultural-symbolic, and the human resource. Most recently these factors have been distilled and popularized by Bolman and Deal (1984), but their roots derive from Parsons' (Parsons, et al., 1953) classic discussion of the components of social structure.

The symbolic and cultural aspects of PQT were particularly visible to school staff and had several dimensions. First of all, in BC's rapidly changing industrial relations environment--where teacher unionism is not favorably viewed by the government and by segments of the public--the visibility of "labor-management" cooperation signalled to participants and outsiders that the district could rise above the conflicts and negotiations in day-to-day work life. One teacher commented that "there's a lot of paranoia becaus ...the administrators and teachers are split apart on the issue [of whether the] pro-D stuff will be coming from the top down rather than from the teachers themselves."

Administrators willingness to support an effort initiated largely by the B.C.T.F. made a positive impression on many teachers. This support was intangible as well as tangible, involving presence at workshops and meetings as well as committing district funds. It involved protecting the project from skeptics inside and outside the school buildings and districts. According to this teacher "the principal offeres the program a necessary stamp of approval and indication of quality. People want to see that from the principal. Survey results reinforce this impression. Teachers believed that both their district's central administration and their individual principal were highly supportive of PQT.

Equally important, public recognition of the professional development component of the project and the willingness to segregate formally professional development and teacher evaluation reinforced this symbolic effect. Part of the symbolism, in fact, occurred in areas where symbolic aspects of PQT actually overlapped with bureaucratic-structural and human resource issues in the organization. Accordingly, in an occupation that is often underappreciated and marginalized, PQT helped administrators and fellow teachers acknowledge and reinforce teachers professional self-concept (Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1988). For instance "I guess one of the most important things...has been the confidence...about my teaching...You realize that what you are doing is really not that awful."

This rhetoric and symbolism of professional enhancement corresponded with the program's emphasis on human resources. Like most teachers, PQT participants identified specific unmet needs. These included the desire for constructive unthreatening performance feedback, for learning through observation, and for ways to overcome teachers' traditional isolation from peers (Lortie, 1975). The two teachers quoted below note the problems: First, "I feel uncomfortable when I have to go into a teacher's classroom to get something...I feel like I'm intruding on their space." Second, however, "two or three years down the road, you feel kind of isolated and think 'I wish somebody had seen that or...I wish someone could give me a hand with this.'" PQT seems to have helped teachers respond to those neds. "PQT helped me take a conscious look at wht I was doing...It was that nice, easy, relaxed approach that makes you aware."

These selections are by no means isolated instances. Survey results indicate participants believed PQT required them to set goals, to communicate with other teachers, to develop a team action plan, and to conference effectively. These interactive skills became more important than teaching theory or familiarity with new teaching strategies. Teachers also believed that PQT contributed to their professional development by enhancing their ability to analyze their own teaching, to incorporate new strategies, and to provide feedback to other teachers. Moreover, but less tangibly, these participants felt an increased sense of professional respect for colleagues, believed they had enriched the value of their professional discussions, and came to understand better the supervision process they had all experienced previously. Professional respect was particularly important: "It never ceases to amaze me that my colleagues have the skills they have. You know that J___ is really professional! I though she was just a common old Joe that I hang around with...but she can really teach.

PQT participants also appreciated the extent to which their principals were willing to support the project without intruding into the evaluation arena that often proves so contentious in public education (Haller & Strike, 1986).

"There was a hell of a lot of relief when I found that we were going to be concentrating on ourselves and not on evaluation in the old sense of the word...[not] the attitude that the way you get quality is you have people spied on by others." In this area the link between the human resource and political elements of the program were especially close. What tied them together was professional development: "I always felt that my evaluation was a bit of a performance...an you simply put on a show instead of working cooperatively in ways you would do outside the school." And, for another teacher, "If the principal is evaluating me, I don't venture off into new areas.

Self-selection also contributed to PQT's success. The program requirement that teachers volunteer, rather than be volunteered, encouraged enthusiasm rather than resistance to change (Hanson, 1985). "We have 11 staff involved of a staff of 24...I think that is why it is working...I do think that it would be an imposition to be imposing PQT on people who are not involved. Sure you may gain a couple of people who might not want to do it, but on the other side...people would resist, then as soon as you have bad feelings going [you have] a rotten apple and it spreads." Participants were generally experienced teachers neither fully satisfied by the status quo nor entrenched within it. "I am one of the younger teachers...and this is my 11th year. We are looking...at people...who ask questions before jumping in an trying it."

Moreover, while program guidelines protected them from superiors, teachers still had to be willing to take the risks of opening their classrooms to peer observers, to learn how to give critical and constructive feedback in a fashion that enhanced rather than inhibited collegial exchange. According to Lortie (1975), teachers traditionally find this difficult. While teacher stress and "burn-out" are difficult to document in research, clearly these teachers came from those who either had avoided burn-out or were anxious to overcome it.

Finally, we should note one of actual as well as the potential rewards of PQT. This was the creation of a PQT subculture among those who had invested

themselves in the program. In several schools, the PQT group provided mutual reinforcement and support, and created a collective sense that participants were an elite group truly grappling with significant professional issues and their own professional development. In short, they developed an active subculture built upon a common sense of their own "reflective practice." According to the survey, PQT enhanced relationships within the group and with the principal, but lead to little or no change in relations with non-PQT staff. However, there seems to have been resentment in some schools: "Try to sell the program? People will resent it. We're the 'in' group...They always see the subs here. They say, oh, are you doing 'quality teaching' today."

These hints of possible tension lead us into larger political aspects of school organization. Research suggests that public schools are highly politicized, with organized and unorganized constituencies struggling constantly over both values and for formal power (Wirt & Kirst, 1989). In British Columbia, particularly, the Social Credit government, attempted to politicize issues of teacher unionism, professionalism, and evaluation. Many teachers, and certainly the B.C.T.F., because consumed by the provincial politics of education.

As PQT focused primarily on professional development instead of evaluation, it could bypass some of these issues. In short, PQT was "off the books" with respect to labor relations. It provided a respite the politics at the federation-district and federation-government levels, and from localized tensions between teachers and principals. In one case where the principal became involved in consultation, peer consultation sessions were less successful, and enthusiasm for PQT was more restrained. Of the seven districts implementing PQT, this one was judged by both program developers and participants least favorably, suggesting that the ways in which the symbolic and political overlapped, may have been a major adverse factor.

PQT, in both theory and practice, seemed to be only loosely coupled to the bureaucratic-structural aspects of school organization. Unlike other educational

changes--schedule or curriculum reconstruction for instance--PQT was primarily an individual-level change, doubled, with few multiplier effects. Participating teachers worked closely with one other and, accordingly, had to schedule meeting and observation times and have the principal arrange for substitutes, but their collaboration had no immediate impact on other colleagues. However, several principals were impressed enough with PQT that they found ways to bring some of its attributes into the formal school structure. Participants did not have to beg collegial sufferance nor expect other teachers to change their own practices. Only in one school where all teachers participated, did PQT have an impact on the master schedule. The absence of structural dislocation had a political effect as well since PQT enthusiasts did not have to drag along reluctant associates. It is not yet clear whether PQT can be generalized effectively to all or most teachers, and whether diffusion--if it occurs at all--will require structural changes that could have their own unintended consequences.

Implications for Educational Innovation

We have allowed Bolman and Deal's "frames" to order the presentation above. However, it is evident that in the world of schools (and probably of organizations generally), the frames overlap substantially. Indeed, it is possible that when organizational change is in progress, the boundaries between frames are more important than the frames themselves. Frames represent not only concepts, but constituencies and interests as well, and "action" inside particular frames can effect each of the others. PQT filled multiple needs: for teachers' professional identity, growth, and recognition; for schools being able to bypass labor relations issues by separating supervision and evaluation, for administrators and teachers having a visible, shared product. These characteristics of PQT cannot neatly be categorized into the "symbolic," "political, or "human resource" frames. Moreover, they linked these frames together. Joint ownership, for instance, reflects a political reality but simultaneously serves as a symbolic referent.

The structural-bureaucratic frame, however, is an exception to the case made above. PQT developers and in-district implementors tiptoed around the structure by stressing volunteerism and by distinguishing teacher evaluation (built into the bureaucracy but with both political and symbolic content) from professional development (largely a human resource issue). In short, they recognized ways in which schools' tendencies towards loose coupling could be exploited. Implicitly there seems to have been a belief that forcing structural change would reverberate, threatening the innovation itself. What resulted, apparently was a quality product, satisfying for participants and unthreatening for non-participants. However, PQT appears to have diffused across rather than within schools, suggesting that only a given percentage of teachers can and will use it profitably. Because the innovation cannot easily "confront" the structure without affecting the symbolic, political, and human resource domains, it remains a program for individual rather than system change.

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